AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method for steganographically combining data, comprising the steps of:

acquiring first data via a first sensor;

contemporaneously acquiring meta-data associated with the acquired first data via a second sensor;

creating a plurality of steganographic data combinations by combining the first data and the contemporaneously acquired meta-data using a plurality of steganographic techniques and a figure-of-merit algorithm for determining an appropriate region of the first data to embed the meta-data for each steganographic technique; and

using the figure-of-merit algorithm to compare the steganographic data combinations and the originally acquired first data to select a steganographic data combination from the plurality of steganographic data combinations with the least discernible changes from the acquired first data

~~figure-of-merit testing the acquired first data and the acquired meta-data to determine appropriate regions of the acquired first data in which to embed the acquired meta-data and which of a plurality of steganographic methods to use to embed the acquired meta-data; and~~

~~combining the acquired first data and the acquired meta-data into steganographic data based upon said figure-of-merit testing, wherein a difference between the steganographic data and the acquired first data is imperceptible.~~

2

2. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of:

      storing the steganographic data <u>combinations</u>.

3. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2, wherein the steganographic data <u>combinations are</u> ~~is~~ stored in memory coupled with the data source.

4. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2, wherein the steganographic data <u>combinations are</u> ~~is~~ stored at a location remote from the site where the first data and meta-data are acquired.

5. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim <u>4</u> ~~1~~, further comprising the step of:

      transmitting the steganographic data <u>combinations</u> to the remote location.

6. (Cancelled) The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of combining produces one or more steganographic data combinations.

7. (Cancelled) The method according to claim 6, further comprising the step of:

      evaluating each of the one or more steganographic data combinations to

            determine the one combination that most closely matches the acquired first

            data.

8. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 1 7, further comprising the

conditional step of:

if all of the ~~one or more~~ <u>plurality of</u> steganographic data combinations perceptibly

differ from the acquired <u>first</u> data, then repeating the step of <u>creating a</u>

<u>plurality of stenographic data combinations</u> ~~combining~~.

9. (Original) The method according to claim 1, whereby the step of acquiring meta-data

is substantially completed before acquiring another first data.

10. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the

acquired meta-data is related to information received from a user.

11. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein:

the first data comprises an electro-optical image produced by a component of a

digital camera.

12. (Previously Amended) The method according to claim 11, wherein:

the meta-data relates to one or more of identification of the acquired image,

parameter settings of the digital camera, an environment in which the

image is acquired, and a spatial description of the camera.

13. (Original) The method according to claim 1, further comprising the step of:

pre-processing the meta-data by hashing the meta-data, encrypting the meta-data, or encrypting the hashed meta-data.

14. (Original) The method according to claim 1, wherein the first data and the meta-data are acquired via the data source at approximately the same time.

15. (Currently Amended) A device for generating steganographic data, comprising:

a first sensor configured to acquire data;

a second sensor configured to contemporaneously acquire meta-data, wherein the meta-data is associated with the acquired data; and

a steganographic engine configured to create a plurality of stenographic data combinations by combining the first data and the contemporaneously acquired meta-data using a plurality of steganographic techniques and a figure-of-merit algorithm for determining an appropriate region of the first data to embed the meta-data for each steganographic technique, wherein the steganographic engine is further configured to use the figure-of-merit algorithm to compare the steganographic data combinations and the originally acquired first data to select a steganographic data combination from the plurality of steganographic data combinations with the least discernible changes from the acquired first data

a steganographic engine configured to combine the acquired data and the acquired meta-data according to the results of a figure-of-merit testing to form steganographic data, said figure-of-merit testing being configured to

5

~~determine appropriate regions of the acquired data in which to embed the~~

~~acquired meta-data and which of a plurality of steganographic methods to~~

~~use to embed the acquired meta-data, wherein the steganographic data~~

~~differs imperceptibly from the acquired data.~~

16. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 15, further comprising:

a memory configured to store the steganographic data <u>combinations</u>.

17. (Cancelled) The device according to claim 15, wherein the steganographic data

comprises one or more different steganographic data combinations obtained using

different combination algorithms.

18. (Cancelled) The device according to claim 17, further comprising:

a figure-of-merit tester configured to determine one of the one or more

steganographic data combinations that differs the least from the acquired

data.

19. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 15, wherein the second sensor

further comprises:

a user interface configured to receive information from a user of the device.

20. (Original) The device according to claim 19, wherein the user interface further

comprises:

one or more different kinds of input devices configured to interact with the user

interface.

21. (Currently Amended) The device according to claim 15, further comprising:

a communications interface configured to transmit the steganographic data

<u>combinations</u> to a location remote from the device.

22. (Previously Amended) The device according to claim 15, wherein the second sensor

is controlled to complete acquiring the meta-data before the first sensor acquires other

data.

23. (Original) The device according to claim 15, wherein the meta-data comprises

hashed and encrypted meta-data portions.

24. (Currently Amended) A digital camera for steganographically combining meta-data,

comprising:

an image plane configured to acquire an electro-optical image;

a sensor configured to contemporaneously acquire meta-data, said meta-data is

associated with the electro-optical image; <u>and</u>

<u>a steganographic engine configured to create a plurality of stenographic data</u>

<u>combinations by combining the electro-optical image and the</u>

<u>contemporaneously acquired meta-data using a plurality of steganographic</u>

<u>techniques and a figure-of-merit algorithm for determining an appropriate</u>

7

region of the first data to embed the meta-data for each steganographic

technique, wherein the steganographic engine is further configured to use

the figure-of-merit algorithm to compare the steganographic data

combinations and the originally acquired electro-optical image to select a

steganographic data combination from the plurality of steganographic data

combinations with the least discernible changes from the acquired electro-

optical image

~~a steganographic engine configured to combine the electro-optical image and the~~

~~meta-data according to the results of a figure-of-merit test to form~~

~~steganographic data, said figure-of-merit testing being configured to~~

~~determine appropriate regions of the electro-optical image in which to~~

~~embed the meta-data and which of a plurality of steganographic methods~~

~~to use to embed the acquired meta-data, said steganographic data differing~~

~~imperceptibly from the electro-optical image~~.

25. (Currently Amended) The digital camera according to claim 24, further comprising:

memory configured to store the steganographic data combinations.

26. (Cancelled) The digital camera according to claim 24, wherein the steganographic

data comprises one or more different steganographic data combinations obtained using

different combination algorithms.

27. (Cancelled) The digital camera according to claim 26, further comprising:

8

a figure-of-merit tester configured to determine one of the one or more

steganographic data combinations that differs the least from the electro-

optical image.

28. (Original) The digital camera according to claim 24, further comprising:

a display area configured to display information related to the meta-data.

29. (Currently Amended) The digital camera according to claim 24, further comprising:

a display area configured to display information related to the steganographic data

combinations.

30. (Previously Amended) The digital camera according to claim 24, wherein the

sensor is configured to acquire meta-data related to one or more of camera angle,

geographical location, environmental conditions, date and time, image subject

identification and image parameter settings.

31. (Original) The digital camera according to claim 24, wherein the meta-data

comprises hashed and encrypted meta-data portions.